

HERULIAN SETTLEMENTS IN BYZANTIUM UNDER EMPERORS ANASTASIUS AND JUSTINIAN*

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to draw attention to the need to intensify historical research on Herulian settlements in Byzantium under Emperors Anastasius and Justinian based on the analysis of written sources. The starting point for studying the history of the Heruli in Late Antiquity should be a historical analysis of the excursus devoted to them by Procopius of Caesarea in the book VI *Wars*. As a result of a historical analysis based on literal interpretation and critical examination, taking into account legal circumstances and the historical context, it can greatly contribute to our knowledge of Herulian history.

To sum up the results of the conducted research, it is possible to give quite a precise description of the relations between the empire and the Heruli based on an analysis of the accounts of Procopius of Caesarea and Marcellinus Comes. In 512, Emperor Anastasius settled the tribe on the empire's lands. Taking advantage of their difficult situation, he probably forced them into full subordination. It seems that the Heruli, deprived of their tribal organisation and striving to keep their independence, rebelled and attacked the Romans at the first opportunity, i.e. ca. 514. The imperial army managed to defeat them as early as 515 or 516, and Anastasius refused to give them the status of allies, i.e. improve their position. In this situation it seems most likely that the empire completely broke its ties with the Heruli and the tribe left the empire's lands.

At this stage of the analysis it is difficult to determine to what extent Procopius was aware of the nuances of Anastasius' policy, as his account of the Herulian migration in search of new lands is very brief and schematic. All the details he provides, apart from the information about the Heruli crossing the Danube River on their own initiative, are in complete agreement with the reconstruction of events based on Marcellinus Comes' mention. Only after completing the analysis of Procopius' whole account on the Heruli will it be possible to formulate conclusions about its reliability and the sources he used.

Key words: Late Antiquity, Byzantium, Anastasius, Justinian I, Heruli, Procopius of Caesarea.

* The size of the material requires that the activities of Anastasius and Justinian be discussed separately.

There are two basic reasons for which the history of the Heruli in Late Antiquity arouses little interest from the perspective of historical studies: the tribe's modest significance and the scant number of sources.¹ Even reading renowned works, it is quite difficult to locate sufficiently complete information about the existence of their kingdom, let alone its role in the political life at the time.² Perhaps this situation will change with the publication of new materials about the tribe and with the current widespread popularity of the subject of ancient and medieval times.³ Whether this will lead to actual progress in historical research is a different matter altogether. The history of the Heruli is still being painted in very broad strokes, and publications about the tribe are frequently based on compilations of out-of-context information from various sources. The only way to limit randomness and arbitrariness in selecting and assessing what information should be used and how is to broaden the analysis of current sources. Otherwise, general reconstructions or attempts to broaden our interpretation by referring to the general historical context may backfire and not only fail to lead to more detailed, established facts about the Heruli, but also blur the picture of the situation in which the Balkan provinces of Byzantium found themselves under Anastasius and Justinian.⁴

In the case of the Heruli, a serious obstacle encountered by researchers is undoubtedly not only the small number of available written sources but also the fact that they only refer to a handful of incidents, which, to make matters more complicated, show the tribe in a different light depending on the origin of a given tradition. Despite such unfavourable circumstances, we can at least try to systematise what we know about the Heruli in Late Antiquity thanks to the fact that in the early 6th century they bound their fate to the empire, and information about them was recorded in sources of Byzantine provenience. Particularly important is Procopius of Caesarea's account included in Book VI of the *Wars* which, although very well known, remains practically unused from the perspective of reconstructing the history of the tribe in Late Antiquity in relation to Byzantium.⁵ In the later parts of his work, Procopius provides further valuable details about the Heruli when he discusses Justinian's policy towards the barbarians in the west and the Gepids' conflict with the Lombards.⁶

¹ Studies on the Heruli: Rappaport 1912; Schmidt 1941, 548–564; Lakatos 1978, 89–90; Taylor 1999, 468–474; Goffart 2006, 205–210; Steinacher 2010, 319–360; Sarantis 2010, 361–362. For a survey of archaeological and linguistic research Brandt 2012, 7–8 (pdf version with introduction from 24 June 2012).

² References to the Heruli appear in the context of analysing Byzantium's western policy under Anastasius and Justinian, especially when the military activities of the latter are discussed, e.g. Capizzi 1969, 171; Demandt 1989, 193; Whitby 2000, 714–715; Haarer 2006, 99; Mitchell 2007, 383; Meier 2009, 224, 235.

³ On the relatively negligible interest in the Heruli in comparison to studies on other tribes in Late Antiquity, see Sarantis 2010, 361–362; Steinacher 2010, 319.

⁴ For example, for a broad picture against the backdrop of Justinian's policy in the region, see Sarantis 2010, 374–375.

⁵ The works of Procopius of Caesarea are some of the most important sources for the history of Byzantium in the first half of the 6th century. For a discussion, see Rubin 1954: 80–81; 1960, 173–174; Cameron 1985, 3–4; Cataudella 2003, 393–394.

⁶ Chapters 33 and 34 of Book VII of the *Wars* are of particular importance for a comprehensive reconstruction of the situation in the territories at the Danube River. The topic of the Gepids' conflict with the Lombards has been a subject of discussion for a long time: Wozniak 1979, 148–149; Pohl 1996, 27–28; Sarantis 2009, 27–28.

It seems that the starting point for studying the history of the Heruli in Late Antiquity should, first of all, be a historical analysis of the excursus devoted to them by Procopius of Caesarea, based on a literal interpretation and critical analysis with references to the historical context.⁷ It should be particularly emphasised that the digression is the only comprehensive account on the history of this tribe, and as such gives us an opportunity to systematise the discussion on controversial topics raised by fragmentary and often seemingly contradictory information from the other surviving sources, which is conducive to proposing hypotheses about, for example, divisions of the tribe.⁸ We should also remember the significance of an analysis of this narrative for studies on the technique and reliability of the historian in the context of a comprehensive interpretation of his works.⁹

The description of the Heruli in Book VI of the *Wars* (VI 14,1–15,36) is a clearly separate excursus in an account of war activities in Italy in 538.¹⁰ Having written about the arrival of Narses' army at Picenum (VI 13, 16–18), which included a substantial, 2,000-man contingent of Heruls, Procopius announces that he will characterise the tribe and present the circumstances in which it entered into an alliance with the empire.¹¹ After the perfunctory mention of the fact that they had lived beyond the Danube River for a long time, the account focuses on a description of their beliefs and customs (VI 14, 1–7). This is followed by a brief depiction of their victories over numerous unnamed tribes. They had subjugated the neighbouring barbarians and imposed their supremacy over the Lombards. After Emperor Anastasius came to power, the Heruli observed peace for three years (VI 14, 8–10). Later, they forced their king Rodolphus into an unjust war against the Lombards, which Procopius scrupulously relates (VI 14, 11–22). Defeated, the Heruli left their settlements and kept moving forward until they reached the territory previously inhabited by the Rugii. These were unpopulated lands, where they suffered hunger and could not support themselves. Forced by famine, they moved to the lands close to the Gepids, who allowed them to settle there. The good relations between the two tribes did not last long, since for no good reason the Gepids started to abuse the Heruli. The latter therefore crossed to the south bank of the river, into the Byzantine territory. Emperor Anastasius welcomed them, but his friendliness did not last when the Heruli in turn started to mistreat the Romans. The barbarians' conduct led to an intervention of

⁷ The following analysis is preliminary and focuses on the source, and as such avoids sweeping commentaries, references to literature etc. The next stage of studies on the broad themes of the history of the Heruli in Late Antiquity should focus on interpreting Cassiodorus' information. It should be taken into account that he may have introduced changes due to the political situation not only after 519, which seems likely in the case of the *Chronica* (Prostko-Prostyński 1994, 224–225), but also after 535 in the case of his other works. Dating individual descriptions from *Varia* may prove to be of key importance, see Steinacher 2010, 347. Jordanes' account is also worth including. The Lombardic tradition certainly requires a separate analysis.

⁸ For a discussion of research problems concerning the history of the Heruli in general, see Brandt 2012: 46–47. In Late Antiquity in relations with Byzantium: Sarantis 2009, 397–398.

⁹ It is necessary to carry out a comprehensive analysis of Procopius' writings. The objective is to establish their message and dating, which will allow us to profile his whole work. In the light of recent research almost nothing is certain, see Greatrex 2003, 67.

¹⁰ The numbers in brackets refer to fragments of the text of Procopius' *Wars*, and the cited passages from the work are from the Hauri – Wirth edition. For a comprehensive commentary, see Rubin 1954, 177–185; Cameron 1985: 218–219; Rabanoglou 2005, 234–235.

¹¹ For the situation in Italy, see Rubin 1954, 177; 1995, 122; Cameron 1985, 188–189.

the imperial army. Defeated in battle, the Heruli could have been completely destroyed. Anastasius spared them, but did not accept them as allies (VI 14, 23–32). Emperor Justinian gave the Heruli fertile lands and persuaded them to convert to Christianity. From that time on, they helped Rome as allies and their manner of life became more civilised, but they still remained the worst rascals (VI 14, 33–36). The Heruli killed King Ochros, which led to yet another conflict with the empire. Although the barbarians did not respect the king and did not want to accept his authority, after the murder they came to the conclusion that they should have a king after all. They believed the best candidate would be a member of the royal family from the island of Thule (VI 14, 37–42).

In the next chapter of Book VI of the *Wars*, Procopius writes about a division among the Heruli. Some of them moved into Illyricum, and the rest, led by members of the royal family, went north to the island of Thule, where, following a long journey, they settled for good (VI 15, 1–4).¹² After a long description of the customs of the local barbarians (VI 15, 4–26), the historian relates the story about the arrival at Thule of envoys from their relatives remaining at the Danube River, who were looking for a suitable candidate for a king. They did find the right man, but he fell ill and died on the return journey. This forced the envoys to return to Thule, where they chose a man named Datius to be their king (VI 15, 27–29). This meant that the arrival of the new ruler was delayed; meanwhile, the Heruli from around Singidunum, concerned about Justinian's response, turned to the emperor, asking him to appoint their new ruler. The emperor chose one of their tribe living in Constantinople, Suartuas, who went to the Heruli at the Danube River and received their support. However, when he wanted to take military action against the approaching Datius, he was abandoned and ran for his life. This, reportedly, was the reason for the Heruli's revolt (VI 15, 30–36).

Earlier, when describing hostilities against the Persians and the Vandals, or the Nika riots in Constantinople, Procopius mentioned the Heruli several times, describing officers and soldiers fighting in the Roman army, and his characterisation was rather ambiguous. There were some good soldiers and notable, meritorious commanders, such as Pharas, but in general the historian associated the Heruli with drunkenness and faithlessness (IV 4, 28–31). They were Arians, which led to problems with maintaining their loyalty in Africa (IV 14, 11–13).¹³ In the excursus, Procopius did not go back to what he had written earlier, but, true to his initial announcement, he aimed to describe the Heruli and the circumstances in which they entered into an alliance with Rome:

Οἱ τινες δὲ ἀνθρώπων εἰσὶν Ἑρουλοὶ καὶ ὄθεν Ῥωμαίοις ἐς ζυμμαχίαν ἔρῳν ἔρχομαι.¹⁴

The account on the Heruli takes up two chapters of Book VI of the *Wars* and, in terms of the topics discussed, it falls into six basic parts:

1) 14, 1–6: a description of Herulian customs.

¹² Rabanoglou 2005, 237–238; Goffart 1988, 90; 2006, 416–417; Steinacher 2010, 353–354; Sarantis 2010, 369 n. 24; Brandt 2012, 22–23, 62–63. There is a lot of interest in the information about the presence of the Slavs on the route of the Herulian migration (VI 15, 2): Kobyliński 2005, 531 in the context of reconstructing their early history. The ongoing discussion is still lively, see Prostko-Prostyński 2011, 155–156.

¹³ All mentions of the Heruli: Haury/Wirth 1964, 234; Lakatos 1978, 7–34; Goffart 2006, 208, 337 n. 108; Steinacher 2010, 349, 352.

¹⁴ Haury/Wirth 1963, 208, 22–23.

2) 14, 8–10: the Heruli build a powerful kingdom, subjugating the neighbouring barbarians.

3) 14, 11–22: King Rodolphus is forced by his tribesmen into a war against the Lombards, which ends in utter defeat.

4) 14, 23–42: the Heruli's escape and their relations with Emperors Anastasius and Justinian.

5) 15, 1–26: a description of Thule.

6) 15, 27–36: Ochos is murdered and a new king is chosen. Internal strife follows and the tribe revolts against Justinian.

We can distinguish two threads, almost equal in volume, in the account: an ethnographical one, understood in broad terms, and a political one, with the latter also including paragraphs containing remarks about the Heruli, showing them in a very negative light as a people (14, 8; 14, 11; 14, 35–36; 14, 41). The ethnographic thread provides details about the tribe of Heruli, while the political one shows their history from a general historical perspective, unfortunately not only in connection with the tribe establishing direct political relations with the empire. Procopius interweaves the ethnographic and political threads and tells several stories about various aspects of the Herulian life, which may have been dictated by his concern about the best possible reception of his work in terms of its cognitive values. The origin and course of the conflict with the Lombards, as well as a considerable portion of the description of Thule, has nothing to do with the characterisation of the Heruli or with their relations with Byzantium. They may, however, be considered attractive from the point of view of the reader's interest. For Procopius' contemporaries, who had no close relations with Illyricum, let alone the barbarian world north of the Danube River, the excursus on the Heruli may have been worthwhile in terms of both its contents and its form. However, the frankly amazing generality and consequent incompleteness of his descriptions of purely political topics make literal interpretation and reconstruction of events difficult. The problem is not the fact that a story about wild barbarians and exotic lands is intermingled with descriptions of political events, because the author made sure that his account was clear and cohesive by skilfully combining the two threads so that the reader would not lose sight of the point. The problem is the obviously abridged and superficial account of strictly political topics. The events which were the turning points in the history of the tribe definitely stand out in the narrative, but the connections between them, as well as their consequences, are less clear. In the context of the author's announcement that he is going to present the circumstances in which the Heruli established their alliance with Rome, there is some inconsistency, since important events are summarised while secondary ones are given too much attention, e.g. the origin and course of the Heruli's conflict with the Lombards.

On the basis of a literal interpretation of this account, it is possible to reconstruct the most important moments in the history of the Heruli under Anastasius and Justinian, from the time when they were forced to migrate after the defeat inflicted by the Lombards:

1) Escape and settling near the Gepids.

2) Crossing the Danube River and settling on the empire's lands, the tribe's division.

3) Mistreatment of the Romans.

4) Victory of the imperial forces and Anastasius' handling of the defeated Heruli.

5) Justinian bestowing new lands on the Heruli and persuading them to convert to Christianity.

6) the death of King Ochos, the election of two kings, and the Heruli joining the Gepids.

The account on the political events directly concerning the Heruli's relations with Byzantium seems very general, full of ambiguities and abridgements, such as Procopius not finishing a story he started (for example the conditions on which Emperor Anastasius accepted the Heruli, or what happened to the Heruli after the revolt), or starting a new topic without any introductory information (e.g. about the sudden appearance of a Herulian king under Justinian). Next to the detailed facts and explanations of connections between the described events, there is almost no chronological data. The reason for all this information lacking was unlikely to have been the author's reluctance to make the text excessively long, since, as we have mentioned, he included some information exceeding what he had declared he would write about. In this context, it may be surprising that specific dates only appear when he describes the birth of the Herulian power at the beginning of Anastasius' reign.

The idea to present a comprehensive description of the tribe of Heruli probably occurred to Procopius when he was working on the account of the wars of Emperor Justinian, trying to grasp the complex political and military situation in the barbarian world and to include it in the description of the war in Italy. The historian explains who the Heruli were and how they found themselves in Byzantium's sphere of influence from the perspective of the mid-6th century. Therefore it is sufficient e.g. to mention briefly that they were a tribe that had long lived beyond the Danube River, and to give some basic facts from their history from the moment which was connected with the contemporary events. The excursus on the Heruli was probably meant to expand the political and military background of the commentary on the war in Italy, and to show not only the connection but also the influence of events in the barbarian world on the situation in the empire. It seems that Procopius was not particularly interested in the history of the tribe as such; he had probably not planned or prepared for tackling the subject, and had not looked for or gathered materials towards this aim, such as works of other authors or imperial documents. However, we have to reflect on the abridgements in the descriptions of recent or even contemporary events, since the author could acquire knowledge about them relatively easily. He participated in military campaigns in which Herulian troops took part and, serving at Belisarius' side, had direct contact with high-ranking military men from Illyricum. The latter could have known him personally, e.g. from the conflicts with the Heruli under Anastasius.¹⁵ It seems that the information used by Procopius to describe Byzantium's relations with the Heruli could just as well have been provided by themselves, other barbarians (e.g. Lombards), or the Byzantines. The historian's dislike of Narses (who was very closely connected with the Heruli) may have considerably influenced his account,¹⁶ e.g. the order of presentation of data (the description of Herulian cruelty opens the excursus), but we should not overestimate it in the context of possibly falsifying facts. Procopius paints the Heruli in a very negative light and there are clear

¹⁵ Procopius was in contact with the Heruli and could obtain information from them, see Schmidt 1941, 552; Prostko-Prostyński 2011, 159; Brandt 2012, 20.

¹⁶ Procopius disliked Narses: Goffart 2006, 207 n. 97; Steinacher 2010, 349.

tendencies to exaggerate their vices, also when describing their conflicts with the empire, but this alone does not constitute grounds for accusing him *a priori* of providing false information about political events regarding Byzantium, and known to many of his contemporaries.

The point of our historical analysis is to read Procopius' account in the correct way, which is very difficult given that he wrote a historical work devoted to events contemporary to himself, which in the reality of his time also meant that he took great care to ensure its literary value.¹⁷ Concern about the best and widest reception of the work may have led to oversimplifying or abridging passages devoted to, for instance, politics or religion. Procopius reconstructed the political history of the Heruli in accordance with his own convention of presenting material, i.e. basing the narrative on just a handful of unrelated descriptions, skilfully put together. This makes the account difficult to understand fully, especially in the case of passages dealing with the emperors' critical decisions concerning the fate of the Heruli, all the more so since they had a legal aspect, and Procopius was not always very precise, even if he applied technical terms used in the imperial chancellery to describe the status of barbarians within the Byzantine legal system.¹⁸ Due to the specificity of the account in this excursus, therefore, a historical analysis must take into account not only the literal meaning of the text, but also the broader context of the account, i.e. what he was writing about in a given passage, how he constructed his descriptions, e.g. the motif of the Herulian migration, etc.

Summing up, it must be emphasised that Procopius' excursus about the Heruli is of unique importance for the reconstruction of the history of the tribe. It is, at least in several places, possible to directly compare its information with accounts from a few independent sources from the era, which gives a more solid basis for reconstructing the Heruli's relations with Byzantium from 512 to the mid-6th century. The first step in such a reconstruction should be to establish the course of events, starting at the beginning of Justinian's reign. The last paragraph of the excursus devoted to the Herulian revolt after the murder of King Ochos refers to a later period and requires a separate analysis, taking into account the whole situation across the region in connection with the Gepids' war against the Lombards.

1) The description of the Herulian migration to the empire's lands is significant for learning about the situation and the distribution of forces in the region, as well as the method Procopius used to construct a description. The chronology of events remains debatable, because the Lombards' victory over the Heruli is dated to ca. 508 on the basis of an analysis of the historical context.¹⁹ According to Procopius (VI 14, 10), this happened much earlier, ca. 494.²⁰ The origin of the conflict also remains unclear, since two different traditions have survived, while – regardless of provenience – the sources agree

¹⁷ Kaldellis 2004, 15, 40.

¹⁸ This is why it is so difficult to establish the exact relations between the Heruli and Byzantium. Using very general terms such as allies or *foederati* requires that the situation in the reality of the 6th century be taken into account: Schwarcz 1995, 290–291; Goffart 1988, 74 n. 263; Pohl 1997, 81–82; Scharf 2001, 71 n. 196; Sarantis 2010, 392.

¹⁹ The most commonly used dating is ca. 508: Lakatos 1978, 89; Pohl 2001, 62; Goffart 2006, 208; Meier 2009, 224; Sarantis 2009, 20. Ca. 505: Schmidt 1941, 552. Ca. 510: Collins 2000, 128.

²⁰ In discussions on the dating, Procopius is also cited directly: Schmidt 1941: 552 n. 4; Krag 2003, 9 n. 4;

that the Heruli suffered a defeat and heavy losses.²¹ The defeated set off in search of new lands, but Procopius does not mention any sort of division of the tribe.²² According to him, following an unsuccessful stay on the lands formerly belonging to the Rugii, the Heruli settled near the Gepids, with their consent:²³

ἄγχιστά που τῆς Γηπαίδων χώρας ἀφίκοντο. καὶ αὐτοὺς Γήπαδες τὰ μὲν πρῶτα ἱκέτας γεγομένους ἐνοικίζεσθαι τε καὶ προσοίκους σφίσι ξυνεχώρουν εἶναι.²⁴

It is unknown how quickly the two tribes fell out. It follows from the description that it could have occurred when the newcomers had settled in. The Gepids first inflicted all manners of abuse on the Heruli, and then started to attack them outright, which made the Heruli leave the territory they were occupying.

2) According to Procopius, the Heruli crossed the Danube River directly after they had left the Gepids, in order to settle among the Romans. Emperor Anastasius reportedly showed them friendliness and assented to their settlement. On the basis of a literal interpretation of this account, it could be assumed that two separate events occurred. First, the Heruli crossed the Danube River on their own initiative, without asking the emperor's permission, in order to settle close to the Romans. The second incident took place after the Heruli crossed the river and found themselves in the empire's territory, because this is when they aroused the interest of Emperor Anastasius: he welcomed them and allowed them to settle there.

ἄπερ Ἑρουλοὶ φέρειν τὸ λοιπὸν οὐχ οἰοί τε ὄντες Ἰστρον τε ποταμὸν διαβαίνουσι καὶ τοῖς ἐκείνῃ Ῥωμαίοις προσοικεῖν ἔγνωσαν, Ἀνατασίου τὴν αὐτοκράτορος ἀρχὴν ἔχοντος ὅσπερ αὐτοὺς πολλῇ φιλοφροσύνῃ δεξάμενος ἰδρῦεσθαι αὐτοῦ εἴασε.²⁵

The barbarians' appearance on the empire's lands is dated precisely to 512, thanks to information related by Marcellinus Comes, contemporary to these events and seemingly well acquainted with the situation in the whole region.²⁶ His mention in the *Chronicle* is very laconic:

*Gens Herulorum in terras atque civitates Romanorum iussu Anastasii Caesaris introducta*²⁷

and, just as importantly, it is the only mention in this source concerning the tumultuous relations between the empire and the Heruli. Perhaps he disapproved of the policy of Emperors Anastasius and Justinian towards the Heruli,²⁸ and therefore focused on the fact of the barbarians' settlement, completely avoiding not only a broader description of how it came about, but also the subsequent failure of this policy caused by the Herulian revolt. It follows from the literal interpretation of this mention that the barbarians' settle-

²¹ The origin and course of the conflict are described on the basis of the accounts of Procopius and Paul the Deacon: Goffart 2006, 336 n. 103; Steinacher 2010, 348–349; Sarantis 2010, 366–367.

²² Rappaport 1912, 1160; Schmidt 1941, 552; Wolfram 1988, 318–319. Referencing Cassiodorus, *Variae* IV 45, it is posited that the Heruli arrived in Italy, and even that the tribe was divided: Sarantis 2009, 20.

²³ The Herulian migration to lands neighbouring with the Gepids is undisputed: Rappaport 1912, 1161; Schmidt 1941, 553.

²⁴ Haury/Wirth 1963, 212, 15–18.

²⁵ Haury/Wirth 1963, 212, 22–213, 2.

²⁶ Prostko-Prostyński 1994, 234; Croke 2001, 48–49, 73–74.

²⁷ Marcellinus Comes ad. 512, 11.

²⁸ Croke 1995, 117; 2001, 131; Goffart 2006, 336 n. 105.

ment was a one-off event which happened in 512 and consisted not in settling them in an empty territory, but among the Romans. The whole operation was very well prepared logistically and, as indicated by the terms used, based on a special imperial constitution.²⁹

Determining the exact course of events in 512 is of fundamental importance, because it was then that the direct cooperation between the empire and the Heruli started. In the light of the literal interpretation of Marcellinus Comes' mention, it is clearly necessary to abandon the literal interpretation of Procopius' account regarding the barbarians' crossing the Danube on their own initiative in order to settle near the Romans.³⁰ Procopius' whole account of the Herulian migration in search of new lands is very schematic. According to him, the defeated barbarians wandered around looking for empty land, i.e. free of other tribes' settlements. *Rugiland*³¹ was uninhabited but devastated, which is why the Heruli had to leave it. They moved close to the Gepids, and later – according to the logic of the account – crossed the Danube River in search of empty land on the empire's territory. However, the situation was probably different at the last stage of their migration, which follows not only from Marcellinus Comes' account, but also from Procopius' next passage. Starting from the Heruli's journey to Thule, Procopius states that those who did not want to cross the Danube set off there. Therefore, considering the whole narration about the Heruli's escape after their defeat against the Lombards, it can be determined unequivocally that the tribe divided when they left the Gepids' territory. It was then that some of the Heruli crossed the Danube and entered the Roman side, and the rest, led by members of the royal family, set off to Thule.³²

After analysing the accounts of Procopius and Marcellinus Comes, the most probable hypothesis is that prior to their crossing, the Heruli had found out the conditions on which they would be allowed to enter the empire's territory. For one part of the tribe, including members of the royal family, they were unacceptable, and so they decided to set off to Thule. The rest of the Heruli agreed to the emperor's offer, crossed the Danube River and did not occupy an empty territory but, as follows from Marcellinus Comes' description, were "introduced" onto already populated lands under the effective control of the imperial administration. The Heruli were settled among the Romans, which seems to be confirmed by Procopius in the following passage, where he mentions their revolt. Marcellinus Comes' very precise mention allows us to verify the abridged, ambiguous and schematic description of the Heruli in Procopius' work. The historian, in turn, provides information which allows us to generally describe the conditions on which Anastasius agreed to accept them as difficult. In the light of our sources, the emperor most

²⁹ Sources and bibliography: Regesten 341. According to Croke (1995, 117; 2001, 74) the Heruli settled on depopulated lands.

³⁰ There are no grounds to base the reconstruction on a literal interpretation of Procopius, or to assume that Marcellinus Comes described only the second incident from his account, i.e. the Heruli's proper settlement on the empire's lands. Sarantis (2010, 372) posits that Anastasius approved the arrival of the Heruli and in subsequent years tried to impose his sovereignty.

³¹ Pohl 2003, 458–459.

³² Rappaport (1912, 1161) identified the reason for the division, which is interpreted ambiguously from the point of view of chronology: Sarantis 2010: 20; Brandt 2012, 22 n. 38, 46.

likely treated the Heruli as *dedici*.³³ There is no indication that they were given the status of *foederati* at the time.³⁴

The lack of information regarding where specifically the Heruli were settled in 512 opened the door for various hypotheses. By far the most prevalent belief seems to be that they were assigned the area near the city of Singidunum, since this was where Procopius of Caesarea placed their settlements (VI 15: 30, and VII 33: 13).³⁵ It is worth noting, however, that the historian mentions such a location of the Heruli later in his narrative, discussing the situation in the times of Justinian, and it was probably true for the 540s, rather than the events described by Marcellinus Comes in 512.³⁶ Other proposed places are more general and limited to province names: Dacia Ripensis or Moesia I.³⁷

Although there is no direct information as to where Anastasius settled the Heruli in 512, the area can be indirectly identified if we take Marcellinus Comes' description as a starting point. These must have been lands under the effective control of the imperial administration, urbanised and populated, which allows us to rule out the northern borders of the Western Balkans, which were hardly inhabited or empty.³⁸ In his description of the Heruli who set off to Thule (i.e. in a different passage than the account of the events connected to their settlement under Anastasius and Justinian), Procopius mentions that they settled down in Illyricum (VI 15, 1),³⁹ although the term is general, it allows us to glean further details. The lands where the Heruli ended up in 512 were probably under the effective control of the imperial administration and were situated in such a way that they were not limited to one province, but at least two, which is why a general term such as Illyricum was used.

3) Procopius provided unique information about the Herulian revolt under Anastasius, when the barbarians started to abuse the local Romans:

χρόνῳ δὲ οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον προσεκερούκασιν αὐτῷ οἱ βάρβαροι οὗτοι, ἀνόσια ἔργα ἐργασάμενοι τοὺς ταύτῃ Ῥωμαίους. (VI 14, 29)⁴⁰

This is a wrongly underestimated and disregarded episode in the history of relations between Byzantium and the Heruli. Unfortunately, the historian did not say when exactly the Heruli became engaged in a conflict with Rome; he only wrote casually that it hap-

³³ Such a form of settlement meant that they were completely subordinate to Roman authorities: Tasler 1984, 286–287. Scharf (2001, 71) posits that the *symmachia* gave them the right of abode and the status of allies.

³⁴ They were not *foederati*, which is how their status is usually described: Wozniak 1981, 374; Rubin 1995, 142; Taylor 1999, 471.

³⁵ Stein 1949, 305; Wozniak 1981, 374; Goffart 2006, 208. Another place also identified as their settlement is Bassianae in Pannonia II, since the empire reportedly recaptured this area ca. 510: Regesten 326; Dušanić 1967, 74–75; Sarantis 2010, 369. They were connected with Pannonia in a later period: Menander Protector, frg. 5,4.

³⁶ Interpretations of Procopius' information on Singidunum: Prostko-Prostyński 1994, 242–243.

³⁷ Dacia: Schmidt 1941, 553; Rubin 1995, 142. Southern Pannonia: Veters 1950, 49. The territories of Moesia I and Dacia: Lakatos 1978, 89.

³⁸ The destruction of the northern Balkans: Whitby 2000, 712–713; Sarantis 2010, 370.

³⁹ Without elaborating, this is how Rappaport describes the area of Herulian settlement: Rappaport 1912, 1161; Taylor 1999, 471.

⁴⁰ Haury/Wirth 1963, 213, 2–4.

pened “soon after”, which probably does not refer to the general dating to 512–518.⁴¹ An analysis of the situation at the time allows us to determine the supposed time of this event with relative precision. Defeated by the Lombards and severely weakened in numbers, the Heruli were unable to put up armed resistance against the Gepids, and only some of them crossed the Danube River into the empire’s territory, since others migrated to Thule. Their military potential was, therefore, relatively small, and after the dramatic experience of neighbouring with the Gepids, it was highly reckless to provoke the emperor, with whom they had just come to an understanding. However, it is unlikely that their revolt was random; although one of its reasons could have been the tendency to disobey, and the wild, uncivilised disposition attributed to the Heruli, the decisive factor was probably their discontent with their living conditions. As Procopius’ later description indicates, following their defeat the barbarians did not want to sever their ties with Byzantium, but to improve their situation. The most favourable conditions for taking a stand against the Romans occurred during Vitalian’s revolt, which shook up Anastasius’ reign.⁴² It is likely that the barbarians could afford to risk a rebellion only when the emperor had lost control over Thracia and was forced to concentrate on keeping Constantinople. This would allow us to narrow the date down to 514, which would concur with Procopius’ statement that it followed soon after they settled on the empire’s territory.⁴³

4) According to Procopius, the Herulian revolt was suppressed without problems, but it is not altogether clear what their subsequent relations with the empire were, since the relevant description is clearly shortened:

διὸ δὴ στράτευμα ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἔπεμψε. νικήσαντες δὲ τῇ μάχῃ Ῥωμαῖοι πλείστους μὲν ἔκτειναν, ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ δὲ πολλῇ ζύμπαντας διαφθεῖραι γεγόνασιν. ἄλλ’ εἰς ἱκετείαν τῶν στρατηγῶν οἱ κατ’ αὐτοὺς γεγονότες ἐδέοντο διασώσασθαι τε αὐτοὺς καὶ ζυμμάχους τε καὶ βασιλέως ὑπηρετάς τὸ λοιπὸν ἔχειν. ταῦτά τε μαθόντα τὸν Ἀναστάσιον ἤρεσκε, καὶ ἅπ’ αὐτοῦ λειφθῆναι μὲν τισιν Ἡρούλων ξυνέβη, οὐ μὲντοι οὔτε ζύμμαχοι Ῥωμαίοις γεγένηται οὔτε τι εἰργάσαντο αὐτοὺς ἀγαθόν.⁴⁴

The events related to the rebellion are discussed in general and, most importantly, contrary to the sources, the consequences it could have had for the Heruli are usually underestimated, as despite their defeat they seemingly maintained their lands and status.⁴⁵ In fact, the conflict was a serious one and the emperor’s response was decisive: he sent an army, which defeated the barbarians on the battlefield and was capable of destroying them all.⁴⁶ The account indicates that Anastasius only agreed to spare the lives of the surviving Heruli, but rejected their request to become allies and serve the emperor.

⁴¹ A mention of the revolt: Rappaport 1912, 1161; Schmidt 1941; Scharf 2001, 71; Sarantis 2010, 371; Steinacher 2010, 351.

⁴² An in-depth discussion of sources: Martindale 1980, 1171–1176 (Fl. Vitalianus). The dating of breaking the bond: Capizzi 1969, 123–124; Meier 2009, 295–296; Külzer 2008, 87–88.

⁴³ Wozniak 1981: 374 posits the date to be 514, without giving any reasoning.

⁴⁴ Haury/Wirth 1963, 213,4–14.

⁴⁵ Rappaport 1912, 1161. They lost their subsidies but remained allies and kept their land in Moesia I: Wozniak 1981, 379–380. Their situation became generally worse because they were no longer allies: Scharf 2001, 71.

⁴⁶ Steinacher (2010, 351) suggests that they were decimated.

Procopius describes these events from a later perspective and very laconically. However, since after mentioning the Heruli's request he clearly states that they did not become allies and they did the Romans no good, it is most likely that the ties with them were broken at the time. Anastasius' conduct may seemingly appear absurd and harmful, since he had an opportunity to choose an evident solution which was beneficial for the state. Yet the emperors' decision not to destroy the defeated Heruli, and to reject their request to serve the empire, can easily be explained when we look at the situation in the region at the time. The military success against Vitalian in Thracia and against the Heruli in Illyricum did not give the emperor complete freedom of action. Vitalian was not crushed and the loyalty of the army in Illyricum was doubtful, as it sided with the opponents of Anastasius' religious policy.⁴⁷ Both destroying the Heruli and leaving them be meant that the army needed to stay on in the region, which could have been risky for the emperor's religious policy. Considering the revolt (i.e. the Heruli breaking their legal bond with Rome and the emperor rejecting their offers after the defeat), as well as the events in Justinian's times, it is most likely that there was a complete break in relations between the empire and the Heruli, who were allowed to leave the empire's territory.⁴⁸ According to Procopius' description of the situation, they had been in conflict with the Gepids,⁴⁹ so the only remaining neighbour who could give them shelter was Theodoric the Great.⁵⁰

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⁴⁷ Marcellinus Comes ad 516.3. Anastasius' relations with the pope and the religious situation in Illyricum: Schwarcz 1992, 3–4; Meier 2009, 311–312; Turlej 2011, 175–176.

⁴⁸ Procopius' account about Justinian's activities regarding the Heruli at the beginning of his reign is quite brief and therefore unclear, but other sources allow us to posit that most likely the emperor renewed cooperation with the tribe on completely new principles. This is discussed in a separate article.

⁴⁹ There are no grounds to assume that the Heruli cooperated with the Gepids and jointly attacked Sirmium ca. 527: Wozniak 1981, 377; Sarantis 2010, 378.

⁵⁰ It is generally assumed that they could rely on Theodoric the Great for help after the defeat against the Lombards: Ensslin 1959, 148. Theodoric supported Vitalian: Demandt 1989, 193 and the Herulian rebellion against Anastasius was also beneficial for the Ostrogoths because it weakened the empire.

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